



NASW

National Association of Social Workers / Connecticut Chapter

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TESTIMONY REGARDING S.B. 184: AN ACT EXTENDING THROUGH
NOVEMBER 8, 2022, SEVERAL CHANGES REGARDING ELECTION
ADMINISTRATION AS A RESULT OF COVID-19 AND CONCERNING
ELIGIBILITY TO VOTE BY ABSENTEE BALLOT AND H.B. 5262: AN ACT
REVISING CERTAIN ABSENTEE VOTING ELIGIBILITY STATUTES

Appropriations Committee

March 4, 2022

Presented By: Kathleen Callahan, MSW

Dear Honorable Chairpersons Flexer and Fox, Ranking Members Sampson and Mastrofrancesco, Vice Chairs Haskell and Thomas, and all other Members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly:

My name is Kathleen Callahan, a resident of Stratford, and the chair of the National Association of Social Workers Connecticut Chapter's Education and Legislative Action Network (NASW/CT ELAN). I am testifying on behalf of the chapter which represents over 2,300 members regarding *SB-184* and *HB-5262* and supports continuing absentee voting in 2022 due to COVID-19.

NASW/CT supports encouragement of voting by all eligible residents. The ongoing threat of the pandemic means voters need the option to vote by absentee ballot through the November 8, 2022 midterm elections. We believe voting is an inalienable right and with complexities and uncertainties remaining in both the health and schedules of many of the voters in our state, retaining the option of absentee voting is important to protecting this right.

Voting is also the most important civic duty of our state's residents. Participating in who will represent you at the state and federal level is what makes this nation a democracy. Any restrictions on this right to vote is unacceptable. Yet Connecticut has the most limited absentee ballot access of any state. Because not all voters meet the narrow reasons for acquiring an absentee ballot, every election eligible voter's find themselves unable to vote. That was before COVID-19. Circumstances have dramatically changed so what was not a defensible absentee ballot process in the past is now an anti-democratic process.

While the state is slowly opening up and we have reason to be optimistic, no one knows what will happen in November. In times of such polarization and division, this appears a

nonpartisan issue with high support. Thanks to the actions of your legislative body, the governor and secretary of the state, and countless municipal officials, steps were taken to ensure safe, secure, and accessible voting over the past two years of this pandemic. As the turnout of 2020 Connecticut General Election demonstrated, Connecticut voter participation is high when there are less barriers: more than 650,000 residents voting by absentee ballot in 2020, leading to a record breaking 80% voter turnout.

NASW/CT asks the committee to continue the safety measures of 2020 and 2021 for 2022 and allow for everyone who fears exposure to COVID-19 to vote by absentee ballot.

With respect and gratitude for your service and consideration,

Kathleen Callahan
NASW/CT ELAN Chair
Stratford, CT